

Ten couples from Angelo and Spring Creek give a dance the first part of March at Mertzon in the Community Center. Portions of the slate have hosted the affair for a tad over 15 years.

The only local folks among the large scope invited from out of town who miss the dance are ones who roll over Stu Evans hill face up to the cemetery during the winter. It was noticeable on my invitation that the ink looked mighty fresh, like it was a nip and tuck call whether ol' Monte would be here for a dance in first part March.

Fortunately, my health hasn't matched the reports across country. Two or three times at the grocery store in Angelo, acquaintances — long-time acquaintances — held back and peeked around an aisle to be sure who was pushing the cart.

Be warned if you have combined the career of writing and ranching, or know someone who acts as a scribe and a herder, that it seems people become eager the final decade for you to move on, shall we say, "to the beyond." Mother used to become furious at that kind of talk; nevertheless, no one could sigh as deep as her and say, "Be like him to outlive me."

On top of hiring good bands for the dance, the hosts prepare a big buffet of delicacies. The deviled eggs, for example, are inspired creations. People quit making deviled eggs after the Big Depression ended. After having them on every picnic, we took awhile to start craving them again, but they sure have made a big comeback in this age of TV dinners.

The ladies dress real pretty, too. The lights will dim low down at the community center. Lots of couples have been married over half a century, yet still clutch into embraces tighter than hammerlocks. Several of the girls know about feed wagons and wire gates; nevertheless, they sure look delicate under dimmed light.

One thing that goes with March dances in the shortgrass country is to bemoan the winds and the dry springs. At any dance it takes until 10 o'clock to switch the men from feeding, or for town models, football.

No way to tell you other than to say outright that the stimulants common to such affairs change conversation topics and put the timid on the dance floor. Boys raised way back in my time are careful to keep their right hand between the ladies' belts and the neckline. The old grape relaxes the elbows.

Does make us so nervous with these low-cut models all bare-shouldered and V-skirted, that we miss more steps than we hit. On purpose, I send at least a dry cow to market the week before the dance to have some market talk to keep my mind off those swirling frocks on the dance floor.

The band played "The Milk Cow Blues" for the first number. The same ol' song we gave Pop Harrison's Texans a dollar to play out at a roadhouse over 50 years ago to make a drunken cowboy holler loud enough the sheriff would throw him out. It was worth that much money to keep him outside; however, when you went out for a cool breath of air, you wished there was another spot further away to move him.

One couple at the dance neighbor out on the highway. Our ties go back to our grandfathers being partners up on the Middle Concho River. One spring at the old ranch, he came over and worked through the whole work because his dad had told him about helping on our roundups. He and his wife operate a lot of places without extra hands and do a magnificent job minding their own business.

Along toward the last hour of the party, alone at the table for a bit, the thought occurred to test in case of emergency whether a ride might be bummed up to the town house four blocks away.

Mertzon is my hometown. We don't have cabs. If the sheriff has to take you home from a dance, busy-bodies do a lot of talking – unnecessary amounts, I think.

First couple I struck was the aforementioned ones. They were coming off the dance floor all heated and excited from the music. Preplanned, I just blurted out that I couldn't find where my car was parked.

Once in Atlanta, Georgia, at an all-night joint, a doorman gave that cold of a stare when I lost my keys on his parking lot. Before cell phones, folks were mighty lucky who had the change to use pay phones after midnight, especially in all-night joints already exhausted from the crowds of celebrants like Southern gents misbehave.

I didn't try a second prospect. I knew all along where the car was parked. And now I know to be careful when I park around Mertzon.